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Harriet Van Horne

AN UNCLEAN FEELING

Recent revelations about the war in Southeast Asia are beginning to make Americans feel unclean. It is one thing to save a small nation from a Communist takeover, quite another to bomb, burn, torture and destroy that nation in the name of a militant "anti-communism" that is no longer valid.

When the world was simpler, our viable alternatives were plainer and their moral consequences were glaringly apparent. There was less need to mask evil, to dissemble facts and to betray the people who trusted us. There was a time when our involvement in Vietnam simply could not have happened. And there was a time when the hideous consequences of that war would not have been tolerated.

Now, because we have tolerated so much evil, the alternatives facing us are much more terrible today than they were ten years ago.

How painful our choices will be in the immediate future is driven home to us by every new and shaming disclosure out of Southeast Asia. But the alternative that will send the sharpest chill through America's bloodstream is this one:

To get heroin out of our high schools we must withdraw all aid and all political support from Southeast Asia.

That is the either/or conclusion reached by Alfred W. McCoy in the new book that is giving the CIA bad nights, "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia."

"There is every reason to believe that 1972 is shaping up as the year of decision for the international narcotics traffic," writes McCoy. "If President Nixon is reelected he will probably continue his policy of giving unqualified support to President Thieu's administration in South Vietnam and to the right-wing governments in Thailand and Laos."

"As long as there is no serious threat of a cut-off in foreign aid or a withdrawal of political support, these governments cannot be subjected to any serious pressure and the narcotics traffic will continue unabated." Such is the considered judgment of Mr. McCoy, a specialist in Southeast Asian affairs, now at Yale University.

If we terminate all aid to South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand and make money available through the United Nations for a strong opium suppression campaign, then, it is presumed, these governments will find the opium trade unprofitable and scarcely worth continuing.

Should we go on propping up Gen. Thieu and all the other corrupt little men who control Southeast Asia, the drug traffic will boom—"and America will have to endure the curse of heroin for another generation."

To withdraw from Southeast Asia would inevitably weaken our military influence in that part of the globe. But, one may fairly ask, haven't we been imperialists long enough? Must we wage war with all the moral fervor of Genghis Khan to demonstrate how much we loathe communism? To be without conscience or honor.

P. McCoy, Alfred

Social Politics of
Heroin in SE Asia

014.01 Drug Traffic

None of the horror stories now coming out of Vietnam should surprise us. We are so far steeped in blood that we've all but lost our capacity for shock. The European press has been reporting the damage to North Vietnamese civilians—and their dikes, schools, churches and hospitals—for months.

The hideous conditions of torture and degradation in Saigon's civilian prisons were first revealed in 1969 by a committee of clergymen, the Study Team on Religious and Political Freedom in Vietnam. Alfred Hassler summarized their findings in a book, "Saigon, USA" (whose foreword, I now notice, was written in 1969 by Sen. George McGovern).

Brutalization by the police and the army, detention of 200,000 civilians without arrest or trial, the torture of women and children before the eyes of their families, all these atrocities were documented and described. The beastly business of confinement in "tiger cages" was exposed back in 1969. And our government, because we are a moral nation (and because our tax dollars are supporting Thieu) promised that such inhuman practices would be stopped.

Now it is 1972. The tiger cages are still there, holding captives whose only crime is opposition to Thieu. The torture—to terrible to describe, in some cases—continues without letup or hindrance. So does the opium trade.

Were this not an election year, one doubts that Henry Kissinger would now be in Vietnam, desperately making one more try for a Nixon Peace. And oh, what an orgy of self-congratulation we'll be seeing in Miami next week if Dr. Kissinger brings home even one small concession from the North Vietnamese!

In the name of humanity, neither the Johnson nor the Nixon administrations could stop the war. But with an avowed peace candidate running against the President, just watch the negotiations get down to business!